

# ROSAURO'S "CONCERTO FOR MARIMBA"

## 30 YEARS AND STILL GOING STRONG

BY LAUREN VOGEL WEISS

Thirty years is a milestone to be acknowledged—just ask any “20-something”! Although music by Bach and Mozart has been around for centuries, the popularity of more contemporary pieces can be as fickle as the audiences and performers. With the plethora of marimba music written in the past thirty years, it is indeed a milestone for one piece to continue to be performed on a regular basis all over the world, helping to popularize the marimba on the concert stage.

Thirty years ago this September, then-33-year-old Brazilian percussionist and composer Ney Rosauro premiered his “Concerto for Marimba” (Opus 12) at the Teatro Nacional de Brasilia, accompanied by pianist Ana Amelia Gomide. Written for marimba and string orchestra during the summer of 1986 in Brasilia, Brazil, the concerto was composed for Rosauro’s master’s recital at the Hochschule für Musik (University of Music) in Würzburg, Germany, where he was studying with Professor Siegfried Fink.

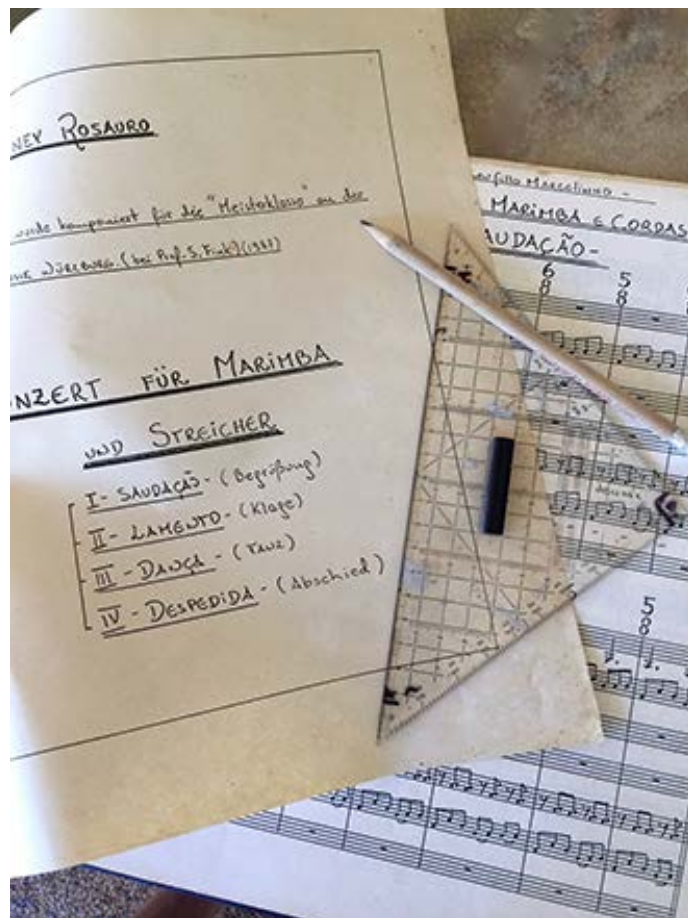
Rosauro debuted the original arrangement with the Manitowoc (Wisconsin) Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Manuel Prestamo, in November 1986. Unlike traditional concertos, this one has four movements instead of three: “Saudação” (“Greetings”), “Lamento” (“Lament”), “Dança” (“Dance”), and “Despedida” (“Farewell”). The 18-minute piece features lyrical melodies and idiomatic four-mallet cadenzas as well as odd meters that keep audiences tapping their toes to the Brazilian- and jazz-influenced music.

Rosauro remembers not being sure who would accompany him during his final recital in Würzburg in June 1987. “The orchestra conductor at the Hochschule was not satisfied with my original hand-written manuscript—the barlines were not perfectly straight because I didn’t use a ruler!—and he refused to play it with his orchestra,” Ney recalls, “so I ended up playing the concerto with piano accompaniment.” Little did he know at the time that this piece, now known as his first marimba concerto, would become a “standard” in the marimba repertoire over the next three decades.

“When I wrote the piece, I wanted to use all the contemporary four-mallet techniques, like independence, alternating strokes, and one-handed rolls,” Rosauro explains. “These skills were not found in the marimba concertos of Creston, Milhaud, and Basta that I had played. I spent hours thinking what kind of approach I could use in each movement to make it idiomatic for the marimba *and* challenging for the player. Now, thirty years later, students have the technique to play it very well.”

After being rejected by several major publishing companies, Rosauro decided to self-publish his concerto through his own company, Pró Percussão Brasil, a practice not as common in the 1980s as it is today. He also did something else innovative for the time: He arranged the concerto for percussion ensemble, performing it in Germany and the United Kingdom in 1987. A wind ensemble arrangement, by Dr. Thomas McCutchen, was premiered at PASIC '99 in Columbus, Ohio with the Capitol University Wind Ensemble featuring the composer as soloist.

“If a concerto is just written for strings,” Rosauro says, “a student may never have the chance to play with an orchestra. But if the artist knows the solo part, he or she could play it with a piano or percussion ensemble—maybe even with a wind



Original score to Ney Rosauro’s “Konzert für Marimba und Streicher” (“Concerto for Marimba and Strings”)

ensemble. The ‘chops’ of the marimba player is the same; the music is the same. I just wanted to give marimbists the possibility to play it anywhere with different ensembles.”

Rosauro, who has written ten other concertos over the years—including his second marimba concerto, composed in 2002 and dedicated to Keiko Abe, and two vibraphone concertos—arranged the main themes from the four movements of the first marimba concerto into one solo work, “Marimba Concerto Suite,” in 2003. “One of my students was doing a competition at PASIC and was looking for a piece. When I wrote the concerto, the marimba practically sang by itself, it was so idiomatic. Since the concerto is a very soloistic piece, I thought it also worked without the orchestra in the background.”

Many well-known percussionists from across the globe have performed Rosauro’s first marimba concerto over the past three decades, including Li Biao (China), Kevin Bobo (USA), Michael Burritt (USA), Evelyn Glennie (Scotland), and Katarzyna Mycka (Poland). Hundreds of students, both high school and college—like Ben Andrews from West Chester University, who performed the concerto with the U.S. Army Band’s “Pershing’s Own” at the U.S. Capitol as the winner of the 2013 National Collegiate Solo Competition—have successfully used the piece to win concerto contests. During the past 30 years, there have been approximately 2,500 performances worldwide (based on rental figures for the arrangements), not counting performances with percussion ensembles or piano, making this piece arguably the most popular marimba concerto ever written.

In 1989, world-renowned percussion soloist Evelyn Glennie first came across Rosauro’s music while participating in Carnival in Rio de Janeiro. A popular British television arts series, *The South Bank Show*, showcased Glennie on a November 26, 1989 broadcast. “They wanted to feature the diversity of percussion playing, both notated and improvised,” recalls Dame Evelyn. “They wanted to explore a more classical setting compared to playing the samba. They liked the Brazilian link for

Ney’s concerto, so I performed that with the London Symphony Orchestra as well as my performance with one of the leading samba schools during Rio Carnival.” Decca released a video in 1991 titled *Evelyn Glennie in Rio*, which was the first recording of Rosauro’s marimba concerto.

“The concerto has a good balance between being technically challenging and musically engaging,” Glennie continues. “It can also be dissected so that individual movements can be used separately, perhaps as encores, demonstrations, or for short radio broadcasts. The length of the concerto is good and does not outstay its welcome. Its musical accessibility is appealing to younger players as well as audiences who perhaps are not used to experiencing percussion as a solo idiom.”

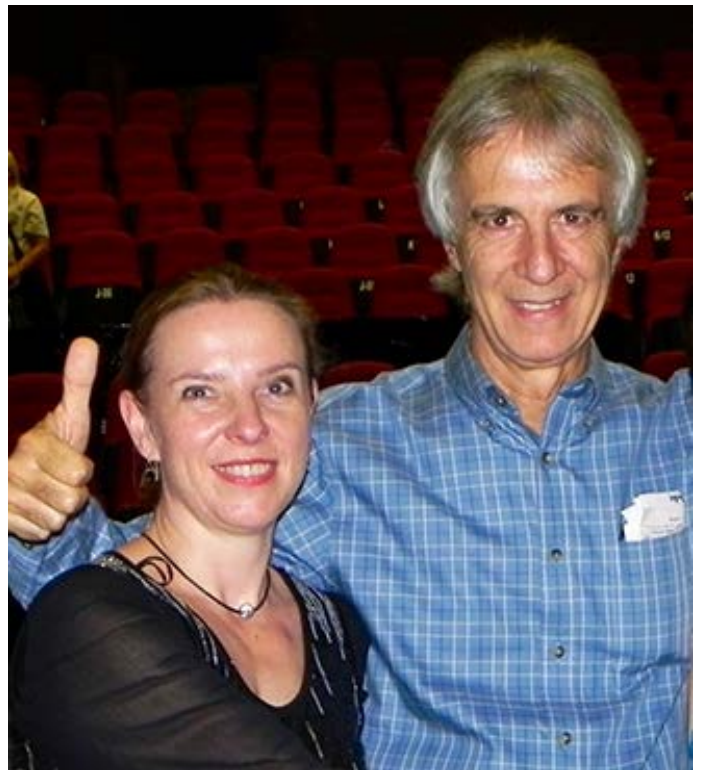
Polish marimbist Katarzyna Mycka, who premiered Rosauro’s second marimba concerto in Lodz, Poland in 2003, remembers the first time she played “Concerto No. 1.” “It was in April 1994 in my hometown of Gdansk. I played with the Polish Baltic Philharmonic Orchestra as part of my diploma concerto. It was quite a challenge technically, and I also used the opportunity to learn how to lead the orchestra myself.”

Why has this concerto stood the test of time and is still being performed on concerts each year? “It has a very clear structure,” replies Mycka, who performed the first movement with a percussion ensemble at the 2016 Days of Percussion in Cyprus this past May. “Every movement has a special spirit, which is understandable for audiences all over the world.”

Glennie agrees. “The piece is very accessible musically and can be easily analyzed from a musician’s standpoint. There’s something very warming about dealing with the key of A minor on a marimba in that it explores the resonance as well



Ney Rosauro performing his first marimba concerto at an International Music Festival in Vale Veneto, Brazil in August 1987 [photo by Renate Rosauro]



Katarzyna Mycka and Ney Rosauro in Tuxtla Gutierrez, Mexico in June 2013 [photo courtesy of Katarzyna Mycka]



Evelyn Glennie rehearsing Rosauro's "Concerto for Marimba" with the Community Engagement Lab (CEL) Festival Orchestra [photo courtesy of John Lazenby/lazenbyphoto.com]

as the percussiveness of the instrument. The mood of each movement is effective with a very good combination between melody and rhythm. It's simply an attractive piece."

Glennie, who performed Rosauro's concerto on her 1992 recording *Rebounds: Concertos for Percussion*, played the marimba concerto in three performances with the Community Engagement Lab (CEL) Festival Orchestra, under the direction of Paul Gambill, in Vermont (in St. Johnsbury, Barre, and Burlington) this past April. "I was asked to suggest pieces using minimal percussion yet were accessible to the outreach program we were dealing with," she explains. "I felt this was a good choice, not to mention challenging enough for the superb string players available. The musicality, care, and detail the conductor brought to the piece were completely different than what I had experienced before with this concerto, which really made the experience wonderfully refreshing."

Does the composer have a favorite movement of his first marimba concerto? "The third movement is the most difficult musically," Rosauro answers, "but it is very melodic. I like the second movement, too, but people have to be careful not to play it too slowly. The four different movements make it a very strong and well-balanced piece; it can be very lively, very happy, very sad, and very 'dancy!'"

Rosauro himself has performed this particular concerto over 100 times in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia. His favorite performance turned out to be the "official" recording. "I very much like the concerts we did with the Orquestra Unisinos, directed by José Pedro Boéssio, in Porto Alegre, Brazil." The 1998 recording can be heard on *Ney Rosau-ro in Concert*.

"Ney's marimba concerto is definitely a piece that young players should delve into with real care so that they can involve themselves in the myriad of musical possibilities with it," states Glennie. "The music looks simple on the page, but it's the imagination that makes the difference as to how the piece is interpreted and projected."

This music is also quite special to Katarzyna Mycka.

"Because of this concerto, I met Ney in person and was able to work with him. He gave me some details about the music, which made me start thinking about different sounds and more variety with my mallets—all very important steps for my personal development!"

With literally thousands of videos on YouTube, from students to professionals, and dozens of live performances in concert halls each year, Rosauro's first marimba concerto will continue to flourish in the years to come, maintaining its status as one of the most popular pieces in its genre. **RIS**